

Engineering the Tunnel

[Narrator] The man in charge of digging the tunnel was a Canadian mining engineer named Wally Floody.

[John Cordwell] “Well, Wally Floody, you didn’t see much of him because he was underground most of the time and he looked like death warmed up. He was so haggard. He was a mining engineer from Canada. He refused to go in those tunnels. They were so... He realized how dangerous they were. So once he became known as a mining engineer, he insisted that the tunnels had to be shored. Wally Floody was more involved in it than anybody else. He was buried a couple of times. He was buried for some time. They had to pull him out of there. He was very lucky to survive.”

[LtGen Clark] “When they opened Stalag Luft III, in April of 1942, it was in a pine forest and initially we tunneled shallow, and we lost every one of them. So we went deep and went down to thirty feet and we never hit anything except pure sand. So we had to shore all the way. It was extremely dangerous. So the tunnels were that deep and all of the three famous tunnels that confused the Germans in that north camp were the successful tunnel program. All were deep. People have asked ‘Where did you get the materials to shore them?’ Well, when they opened that camp, the Germans made a very bad mistake, they put complete sets of bed boards in every bunk and, by the time that tunnel was finished, people were strapped, tying wire and rags in there, and rope, to sleep on because all the bed boards were down in the tunnels.